

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATIONS OF MITCHELL E. DANIELS, JR., TO BE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET; ANTHONY JOSEPH PRINCIPI, TO BE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS; AND MELQUIADES RAFAEL MARTINEZ, TO BE SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The legislative clerk read the nominations of Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., of Indiana, to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget; Anthony Joseph Principi, of California, to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and Melquiades Rafael Martinez, of Florida, to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, Mel Martinez has a great story. He is a self-made man who is destined to do great things. At age 15 he fled Cuba during the airlift of children known as Operation Pedro Pan. Although, he was alone, he would soon begin his American Dream.

A graduate of Florida State University College of Law in 1973, Martinez joined an Orlando firm and practiced personal injury law. During his 25 years of law practice in Orlando, he was very involved in a variety of community activities. In 1984, he was appointed chairman of the Orlando Housing Authority by the mayor. He held this post for two years, later serving as president of the Orlando Utilities Commission.

He also served as Chairman of Governor Jeb Bush's Growth Management Commission, declaring a moratorium on new residential projects in already-crowded school districts.

In 1998, he was elected Orange County chairman. As the Chief Executive of a government, he was responsible for providing complete urban services to over 860,000 people. In this mayoral-like role, he advocated home ownership programs for low-income families and lowered property taxes. He concentrated on programs emphasizing public safety, growth management, the needs of children and families, clean neighborhoods, improved transportation, and the streamlining of government.

As Secretary of HUD, Mr. Martinez, assumes the \$30 billion budget, which faces a critical shortage of low-income properties and mid-income rentals. According to a recent HUD report, 5.4 million families pay more than 50 percent of their gross income for rent.

Mr. President, I believe that Mel Martinez will be a great asset for HUD. Because of his life story, he will be able to handle the sensitive issues faced by this department. His story speaks for itself. From a child fleeing from Cuba, to a successful Chairman, he has created his success.

Mr. President, it is with honor that I support Mel Martinez as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to voice my strong support for the confirmation of Mel Martinez to be Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. I am impressed by his background and his commitment to providing safe, affordable housing to all Americans. Based on my review of the Mr. Martinez's record as a public official in Orlando and Orange County and his expressed dedication to the mission of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, I believe he will make a superb Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. I support his nomination and urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mel Martinez has an extraordinary story. At the age of 15, he fled Castro's Cuba to come to the United States without his family. He stayed with a foster family for four years before the rest of his family could join him in Orlando. After earning a law degree from Florida State University, Mr. Martinez entered private practice, but also served on numerous public boards and committees. He served on the Board of Directors for the Orlando Public Housing Authority from 1982 to 1986. He was the Chair of the Orlando Affordable Housing Task Force in 1984, and President of the Orlando Utilities Commission from 1994 to 1997.

Since 1998, Mr. Martinez has served as the Chief Elected Official of Orange County, Florida. He has a reputation for championing "Smart Growth" and for understanding the need to ensure affordable housing for all citizens. He even established a commission to identify new ways to provide affordable housing.

Assuming that Mr. Martinez will be confirmed, he comes to HUD at a good time. Clearly, the nadir of HUD's existence was during the 1980s when the Department was riven by mismanagement and even worse. Jack Kemp deserves credit for his commitment to reform and improving housing opportunities for the people served by HUD. He worked hard and achieved significant progress.

The last eight years have seen a continuation of reform and a realization of many of the goals of reform. The homeownership rate is now the highest in history—67.7% of all American families, nearly seven out of every ten families, own their own home. Nine million households have been added to the ranks of homeowners since 1993. We've also seen record high levels of homeownership for urban-center African-American and Hispanic families. The volume of Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans has doubled in recent years. FHA now has about 6.7 million mortgages in its portfolio. FHA has gone from a \$2.7 billion deficit to a current value of more than \$16 billion. HUD has also recognized the changing needs of our aging population by producing a Housing Security Plan for Older Americans.

HUD has made progress, but there is still much work to be done. There is

still a pressing need to meet the continuing challenge of helping all Americans achieve the dream of homeownership and the promise first made over half a century ago in the National Housing Act: a safe and affordable place to live for all Americans.

One of the most troubling paradoxes of our recent prosperity is that despite the fact that incomes have risen for people in every income category, safe and affordable housing is more elusive than ever for many low- and moderate-income families. That is because the cost of housing has outpaced the increase in wages in many of our urban centers, including areas of Connecticut that now rank among some of the most expensive housing markets in the country.

We are losing public housing units in our country at an alarming rate. In some parts of the country, like the Northeast, the age of public housing units has necessitated the demolition of many units that have become too deteriorated to be rehabilitated. Federal policy has tried to provide public housing residents with housing vouchers, but frankly, there just aren't enough of those vouchers to go around. Further, in high-cost housing markets vouchers haven't always been useful to low-income families because they can't always find landlords who are willing to accept the vouchers. And even with vouchers, many find rent to be all but out of reach.

We need more vouchers. We also need to invest in capital maintenance, and rehabilitation funding to ensure that public housing units remain habitable. And if we have dilapidated public housing, then we need to put money into building replacement units. While vouchers work in some places under some circumstances, they don't work everywhere under all circumstances.

I also believe that the Federal government needs to think ahead to address issues that will arise as our elderly population continues to grow. We should consider creating tax and other incentives for construction of privately-owned assisted living units. The time has also come for HUD to consider developing new standards or approaches to ensure that senior citizens who live in public housing can stay in their homes and not be forced prematurely into expensive and less independent institutional care facilities.

These are not trivial matters. They are tough problems. But from what I have been able to discern, Mel Martinez is up to the task. He has the knowledge, the energy, and the commitment to lead HUD as the agency begins to address these matters.

I look forward to working with Mr. Martinez. I have already invited Mr. Martinez up to Connecticut. Connecticut has some of the oldest housing in the country, but we also have some of the country's most successful affordable housing projects. I welcome the opportunity to show him our state and, again, to work with him on behalf of

all Americans seeking a good home for themselves and their families.

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the nomination of Anthony J. Principi to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I am pleased that President Bush has selected a person of experience and ability for this important position.

Mr. Principi has a strong background and association with the military community. He is a veteran of the United States Navy, a graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy, and a highly decorated Vietnam veteran. He also served in the Navy's Judge Advocate General Corps.

Mr. Principi is well qualified for this position, having previously served as Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Deputy Secretary of the VA. I personally know him to be a capable and dedicated public servant. In 1993, I called upon Mr. Principi to be my Staff Director for the Senate Armed Services Committee. Later, as Chairman, I appointed him to a Congressional Commission on Military Servicemembers and Veterans Transition. He subsequently was elected by his colleagues as Chairman of that Commission. In each of these instances, his performance was exceptional.

There are a number of important issues facing the Department of Veterans Affairs which affect veterans, their families, and employees of the Department. I will mention a few of these issues to emphasize my own concern and to stress to Mr. Principi that he must aggressively address these matters.

The first issue I hope Secretary Principi strongly addresses is that of Veterans Benefits. It takes too long now to get initial decisions and the review process can take years. I hope Secretary Principi will work with the Under Secretary for Benefits to improve the VA benefit review process.

Second, I am concerned about the status of veterans health care. The Congress and the VA have enacted and implemented a number of reforms. The challenge now is to ensure that the availability, delivery and quality of health care improves.

A third concern I have relates to the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation, VERA, process. A few years ago, Congress passed a bill that requires the VA to allocate resources according to veteran population and use of VA medical facilities. This legislation generally has shifted some resources from the Northeast to the South and West. I trust Secretary Principi will continue to support this important reform despite political pressures to do otherwise.

I congratulate Mr. Principi on his nomination. As a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I look forward to working with the Secretary as we address the needs and concerns of the men and women who have given much for our Nation.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, as the ranking member of the Com-

mittee on Veterans' Affairs, I am pleased to support the nomination of Anthony J. Principi to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs. If confirmed, Mr. Principi will have the responsibility of steering the Department of Veterans Affairs through a period of great transformation.

I recently had the chance to meet with Mr. Principi and to discuss the many challenges he will face in guiding the VA through this critical period. I have also had the opportunity to read his answers to prehearing questions and to hear his testimony at the January 18, 2001, hearing of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on his nomination. Mr. Principi has expressed his belief that our veterans deserve access to quality health care and swift and accurate decisions about disability benefits. I wholeheartedly agree and believe feel that Mr. Principi has the experience and the commitment to maintain this special obligation to our Nation's veterans.

I know that with his years of service to veterans—at VA, here in the Senate, and as chair of the Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition (the so-called Transition Commission)—Mr. Principi is familiar with the importance of the leadership role he will soon assume at the VA. Because of his long history and experience, we have great expectations for his success, and we expect him to hit the ground running to tackle the VA's many challenges.

We have all heard the President speak about the need to revamp the VA health care system. But what exactly does that mean to veterans who depend upon the VA? Yes, we have made many sweeping changes in the delivery of VA health care. Veterans' health care is now very often provided in different settings, which are frequently not the traditional hospital site. Outpatient clinics cover the VA landscape and provide new access points to many veterans. And veterans—unlike many other groups—now have improved coverage of their long-term care needs, although VA has been embarrassingly slow in implementing some of these programs.

But while the past decade has brought tremendous transformation to the VA health care system, we may be approaching the most challenging period of all. The VA medical system offers programs of enormous value, especially for veterans who are blind or have spinal cord injuries, who need prosthetic devices or dependable mental health care. We must retain these specialized services, offered nowhere else in the U.S. healthcare landscape, which have made the VA great.

Mr. Principi understands that, if confirmed, he will be expected to be a steward and protector of this very special health care system. America's veterans will accept no less.

The Veterans Benefits Administration is in crisis. Last year, Chairman SPECTER chaired a hearing on the bene-

fits adjudication system, and we were greatly disturbed by what we heard about the lack of quality and timeliness in VBA decisionmaking. At that hearing, a Vietnam combat veteran from my state of West Virginia, suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder, testified that it took a full five years for his VA disability claim to be approved. The documented chronology of events over that five-year period paints a clear picture of a benefits system that needs a great deal of work. This is just one example of the many cases my staff hear about daily.

We continue to be dismayed by the delays in making eligibility determinations. And despite efforts by hardworking, dedicated VBA employees, which have yielded some gains in customer service, the problems with VA claims' processing seem to be getting worse. In fact, the backlog has increased by 50,000 claims just since we held that hearing last July.

You know the old saying: "Justice delayed is justice denied." Our aging veterans population cannot afford to wait. We look to Mr. Principi for innovative approaches so that VBA can absorb changes in law and new business processes without always going into a tailspin. We must do better than this.

Mr. President, in my view, Mr. Principi is well qualified for this important position. He would bring to it his many experiences as an advocate for veterans' needs, as well as his sincere commitment to their well-being. I urge my colleagues to approve this nomination.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today to give my strongest recommendation for the confirmation of the nomination of Anthony Principi to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

On January 5, 2001, then President-elect Bush announced his intention to nominate former-Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Tony Principi, a man I have known for more than 20 years, to be his Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I support this nomination, and I am pleased that the President decided to recommend him for this important position.

Tony Principi served as Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs and as Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs for President Bush from 1989 to 1993. I am confident that he will, once again, be a competent, trustworthy, effective Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Tony Principi is a graduate of the United States Naval Academy and a decorated Vietnam Veteran. He earned a law degree from Seton Hall University in 1975. He was a professional staff member, Counsel and later Staff Director for both the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

In 1996, Tony was named as the Chairman of the Military Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance Commission. This Congressional Commission reviewed the adequacy and effectiveness of the services and benefits available to active

duty service members and veterans. A number of the Commission's recommendations fall under the cognizance of the Armed Services Committee. I have carefully reviewed the recommendations and have initiated action to implement many of the improvements and efficiencies recommended by the Commission. As Chairman of this important Congressional Commission, Tony did a superb job with a very difficult task.

Tony's father is a veteran of World War II. His wife, Elizabeth is a veteran of 30 years of service as a Naval officer and his two sons are serving on active duty in the Air Force today.

Tony's personal experiences in a family of veterans as well as a midshipman, Naval officer give him an excellent perspective on the issues facing veterans. His experience as a staff member on the Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committees and as a Cabinet official in the Department of Veterans Affairs makes Tony uniquely qualified to address the many issues he will face as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. President, I had the opportunity to meet with Tony in my office the day prior to his confirmation hearing before the Veterans Affairs Committee. During our discussions, he assured me that he would take timely and positive action to ensure that employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs will assist veterans in applying for benefits and filing claims for reimbursement and payments. This was an important issue on which the Armed Services Committee took a leading role during consideration of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001. I was pleased that Tony agreed that it is a duty of the Department of Veterans Affairs personnel to assist veterans in successfully navigating the difficult claims processes. We also discussed opportunities for increased cooperation between the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs in the health care arena. I look forward to working with Tony on these and other important issues concerning active duty military personnel and veterans.

I support this nomination. I urge my colleagues to support the nomination as well. Secretary Principi will be a crucial part of the great team that President Bush has assembled.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of M. Anthony Principi as Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Our Nation's veterans are important to all of us. From time and memorial, the men and women of our country's Armed Services have dedicated themselves to freedom and democracy. They have done far more than representing freedom, they have given themselves to the cause, fighting for those inalienable rights that many of us take for granted.

There are 24.8 million veterans in the United States, 165,000 of which are in

my own state of New Mexico. This means that all of us know a veteran. In fact, one out of every four men in the United States is a veteran, and there are 1.2 million female veterans. We must continue to work for the continued well-being of our veterans, as they are our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and sons.

Health care is important to all of us, and veterans are no exception. I have worked with other members of Congress to dramatically increase funding for veterans' health care. I know that more needs to be done for veterans and pledge myself to work for their interests.

The head of the Department of Veterans Affairs will be presented with unique challenges. The Secretary must be pro-active and must have a comprehensive understanding of veterans' issues.

In that vein, I am confident that Mr. Principi is the best person for the job. As a decorated Vietnam War veteran, Mr. Principi can intimately relate to veterans' special needs.

Furthermore, he can fully appreciate the Department of Veterans Affairs after serving as Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Department under the previous Bush Administration. Mr. Principi applied his pro-active attitude and experience when he ordered the creation of a registry to track medical conditions of Gulf War veterans.

Furthermore, Mr. Principi chaired the bipartisan Congressional Commission on Military Service Members and Veterans Assistance under the previous Administration.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has put forth significant effort in moving towards a "One V-A" in attempting to deliver seamless service to veterans. Yet, coordinating VA's various missions as technology advances remains just one challenge that Mr. Principi must address.

Mr. Principi is a veteran. He has spent his life working for veterans. Mr. President, Anthony Principi is the best person to head the Department of Veterans Affairs.

As Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Principi will surely be tested. I am confident that he will ace the test.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of Tony Principi's confirmation as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I have known him for many years both as a staffer and a friend. He was my staff director when I was chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee many years ago. Since then I have come to value his advice and expertise about our nation's veterans as much as I have come to value his friendship. His experience both within the government and the private sector, along with his desire to give veterans the kind of services they deserve, makes Tony the best man for the job. I support his confirmation and urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nominations of Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget; Anthony Joseph Principi, to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and Melquiades Rafael Martinez, to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development?

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 100, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote Nos. 1, 2, 3 Ex.]

YEAS—100

Akaka	Durbin	McCain
Allard	Edwards	McConnell
Allen	Ensign	Mikulski
Baucus	Enzi	Miller
Bayh	Feingold	Murkowski
Bennett	Feinstein	Murray
Biden	Fitzgerald	Nelson (FL)
Bingaman	Frist	Nelson (NE)
Bond	Graham	Nickles
Boxer	Gramm	Reed
Breaux	Grassley	Reid
Brownback	Gregg	Roberts
Bunning	Hagel	Rockefeller
Burns	Harkin	Santorum
Byrd	Hatch	Sarbanes
Campbell	Helms	Schumer
Cantwell	Hollings	Sessions
Carnahan	Hutchinson	Shelby
Carper	Hutchison	Smith (NH)
Chafee	Inhofe	Smith (OR)
Cleland	Inouye	Snowe
Clinton	Jeffords	Specter
Cochran	Johnson	Stabenow
Collins	Kennedy	Stevens
Conrad	Kerry	Thomas
Corzine	Kohl	Thompson
Craig	Kyl	Thurmond
Crapo	Landrieu	Torricelli
Daschle	Leahy	Voinovich
Dayton	Levin	Warner
DeWine	Lieberman	Wellstone
Dodd	Lincoln	Wyden
Domenici	Lott	
Dorgan	Lugar	

The nominations were confirmed.

NOMINATION OF TOMMY G. THOMPSON, OF WISCONSIN, TO BE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KYL). The clerk will report the next nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Tommy G. Thompson, of Wisconsin, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the debate will include 60 minutes of time under the control of Senator WELLSTONE, with 40 minutes for the chairman and ranking minority member of the Finance Committee and 10 minutes each for Senators FEINGOLD, KENNEDY, and REID of Nevada.

Who yields time?

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I yield myself such time as I might consume.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa is recognized.